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The Man of Letters and American Culture

By

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I am not unaware of the fact that I have chosen (happily at the suggestion and with the consent of your committee)[1] a difficult and intricate subject. It is a grave subject, too, and one very heavily freighted with meaning for our entire cultural situation. And so you will, I am sure, forgive me for the tentativeness and even desultoriness of the observations that follow.

If we are to speak of The Man of Letters in American Culture, we had better a little define our terms. For the man of letters, who is a man of scruples, who tests his acts as an artist, a thinker, even a citizen, before the interior court of his conscience, hardly exists among us today. A Sinclair Lewis who once wrote two greatly and perhaps permanently effective books and who has been re-writing those two books more feebly and noisily ever since is no man of letters; Pearl Buck who wrote one faintly beautiful book and then plunged down among the crowd of easy entertainers is no woman of letters. I name these two because the Swedish Academy, after its various aberrations, has just, as it were, come to its senses again, and given the Nobel Prize to Mr. T. S. Eliot, who is, according to the marks I have proposed, a true man of letters. His precise stature as poet, critic, thinker, is likely to fluctuate for long. But the man who wrote Ash Wednesday and sundry other poems as well as the essays "Tradition and the Indi-

1. This address was originally delivered before the New England College English Association, November 27, 1948.

vidual Talent", and "Religion and Literature", is evidently allied to the great tradition of the man of letters which I have in mind.

It may be useful to examine that tradition for a moment through a few of its great exemplars. And the figure that first comes to my mind, almost as type and symbol, is that of Milton. The one flawless poetic artist in the tongue we speak, he lost his eyesight in the service of the commonwealth; he descended into the arena to defend the rational liberties, both public and private, of man; he had a powerful and coherent vision of the sum of things that he strove to make to prevail. A certain severity of temper he used in seeking "to justify the ways of God to man" a saying which, rightly interpreted, may be taken as a summing-up of both man's and the man of letters' whole business in this world, is still resented by the dilettanti and the dabblers who, as Goethe tells us, "negate the master and try to make mastery appear to be egoism."

Let me dwell for a moment on this trick of the dilettanti and the dabblers. It has become more wide-spread in this age; its almost conspirational character in contemporary America abashes spirits of mediocre force and daring who might, in a kinder climate, have been men of letters on a moderate scale. But who among us will answer the dilettanti and the dabblers in the spirit of Andre Gide's magnificent notation: "*Je ne me savais d'abord si redoubtable; mais: on me combat, donc je suis.*" ("I did not at first know myself to be so redoubtable; but: they fight me, hence I am.")? Who, in our apparently easy-going society, in our apparently almost jolly world of literary trafficking, would not wince at the jibe a reviewer addressed to Thomas Mann the other day? "No writer in this century," the reviewer (to whom I am coming back presently) wrote, "has won such universal admiration and *none has felt himself more worthy of it.*" You get the implication of the sullen dilettante and dabbler. Greatness is "putting on side"; an occasional glimpse of it followed, as the dabbler could not know, by other moments of anguished doubt—this is resented as arrogant detachment from the gay crowd of purveyors of merchandise in the pseudo-literary market-places whose ambition was defined and written down forevermore by Jules Lemaitre in his precious execution of the novelist Georges Ohnet. "There is nothing in him that rises above his readers, nothing that shocks or eludes them. His novels are cut to their exact measure; M. Ohnet presents to them their own ideal. The banal cup he holds to their lips they can drink, they can drain it to the last drop." It is the Georges Ohnets among us whom the reviewers relish and really read. Yes, they do read them, in spite of Goethe's wry jest: "*Seit man die Buecher rezensirt, liest sie kein Mensch ausser dem Rezensenten, und der auch nur so, so.*" "Since book-reviewing has come up nobody reads books any more except the reviewer, and he only after a fashion." But from this very jest of

Goethe's you can see that the path of the man of letters was no flowery one in his age and country either.

He, indeed, is a better illustration of the character and temper and function of the man of letters for us than Milton. For Goethe, as Emerson saw with his exquisite clarity of vision—"Goethe is the pivotal man of the old and new times. He shuts up the old, he opens the new." The two-thousand poems, the whole of Faust, above all, the richly chronicled and commented experience of the man between earth and sky, are as fresh and pertinent to us as though he were in our very midst. We need not reinterpret him for our day and use. He is the great exemplar of the man of letters in the modern age. As profoundly as Milton he wanted his art to transform man, to cause his vision of perfection and of the perfect life within the world and the universe to prevail. Mournfully enough, therefore, he wrote to Zelter in 1804: "It is an evil thing in our time that the work of art which should first of all affect the living, finds itself, in so far as it is sound and worthy of eternity, in contradiction to the age, so that the true artist often lives in loneliness and despair, the while he is convinced that men are in search of the very thing he possesses and can communicate. Thus as he said, sundry of his works did not find an adequate audience, despite his great fame, until more than a decade after their composition; thus, too, he refused to have the second part of Faust published while he lived. For years the dilettantes and the dabblers had demanded "another Werther" of him. Doubtless he did not want to hear the complaint that the second Faust was not a replica of the first.

These difficulties of the great man of letters are never either old or new. Gide has set them down with great precision. "Each of my books is hostile to the admirers of the preceding one." And again: "In ten years it will be recognized that the qualities thrown up against a book of mine today, are its rarest ones." And these difficulties, it will be seen, spring directly from the character of the true man of letters: his scrupulousness as both artist and communicator of truth—if such a division is admissible; his inner research and deepening (*Vertifung—approfondissement*) which makes each new work of his the expression of another and a riper phase of his total being; his determination—unrelated to argument or polemic—to make his vision of the sum of things, "of man and nature and of human life", prevail. Thus he needs to persuade yet cannot stoop to please. He is immensely willing to yield to the demand of his day, to what Goethe called *die Forderung des Tages*, a phrase which significantly enough, Thomas Mann has chosen as the title of a volume of his essays. But it is hard for him, when his day, his age, does not make that demand upon him and seems to have no need of him or, what is worse and what, alas, is true of America today, treats him with the malice of self-contempt

projected outward or—and this is the lowest depth and the final degradation—sucks him into its swamps and literary morasses, as has happened before our eyes to two men as gifted and truly distinguished once upon a time as Mr. Somerset Maugham and Mr. Aldous Huxley.

Is there great need of adducing other examples of the man of letters? The "format" as Thomas Mann is fond of saying, may vary; the character remains the same amid sharpest variations in mood, form, temper. It remains the same in Swift and Johnson, in Lessing and Voltaire. The nineteenth century offers many examples through both feebleness and excesses, despite *both* genius and talent, tend to tarnish purity and fragmentize wholeness. Yet Carlyle was a man of letters, and so was Victor Hugo. Tolstoi was one, though so oddly warped a one in the end. Lesser but more amiable and still unmuted figures abound—Hebbel and Matthew Arnold and Jules Lemaitre. There is no need to multiply names and each student will select those most conformable to his taste and temper. The last quarter of the nineteenth century, moreover, saw the birth of a group of quite pre-eminent examples—of Paul Valery and Andre Gide and, above all, of that transcendant artist and noble servant of mankind, Thomas Mann.

American literature, which I deliberately left to the last, started out notably well. We had Emerson, luminous, acute, with a smaller but genuinely Goethean insight into the concrete as well as into the sum of things. We had the shapely prose of Thoreau embodying his cool uncompromising vision. We had, in a later generation, the extraordinary phenomenon of Henry James, an artist not wholly able to live up to his own genius through temperamental defects. But the bleak neglects under which he agonized and the eccentric character of his revival—not by any part, however small, of the nation, but by odd cliques and pseudo-esoteric tastes—these are already parts of the dark shadow under which we live. "The literary man in this country," Emerson wrote in his journal in 1836, "has no critic." That brief and laconic over-simplification tells the story of the many succeeding years. It tells the story of our own time. There is no criticism in America. Take that in its broadest sense from literary conversation by fire-side or at an inn; there are no critical reviews; there is no *valuing* public of any extent. There are a few academicians, like ourselves. There are the 900,000 poor "dumb driven cattle" of the Book of the Month Club; there is the vaster herd of the Literary Guild. The rest is silence.

II

Emerson's complaint that the literary man in this country has no critic was uttered two years after Goethe's death. Wordsworth was at the peak of his influence, if not of his power. The French Romantic movement sent forth its rather dazzling rays. Though remote and pro-

vincial, America was within this world. There were people especially in New England, who vibrated to the same strings and so the succeeding years brought forth not only the poems and essays of Emerson but the writings of Thoreau, of Poe (who had only then another fifteen years to live) and of Hawthorne. And Emerson and Hawthorne, at least, made their way in their American world. They were able to create the taste by which they were gradually appreciated. The human world in this vast land was small. It has not, perhaps, been sufficiently emphasized that a cultivated and valuing minority functioned not ineffectively between, say, 1830 and the War between the States. It is clear today that Longfellow was a quite minor poet. But the immense popularity of even a Longfellow puts to shame an age which has found a substitute for him in Eddie Guest.

Neither Goethe, who entertained high hopes for America, nor Emerson could have foreseen the American cultural scene of today. For they could not have foreseen the liberalistic devaluation of values which set in roughly somewhere between 1859 and 1870 and against which only today a few solitary voices are being raised. They could not have foreseen the great and universal doctrine that it is the business of man in society to adapt himself to his environment, to be in no respect different from his fellows, to eschew the critical mood and the critical temper and to limit his effort to change his environment by the multiplication of mechanical gadgets. Least of all could they have foreseen a system of higher education—breached at this hour and, I pray about to crumble—in which a man, a citizen of the Republic, a member in good standing of the American Association of University Professors, could declare at a faculty meeting of a mighty university that poultry husbandry and the Attic drama were *equivalent* instrumentalities for the higher education of youth. Please mark the word "equivalent" which unblushingly he uttered. In that word he summed up what might well be called the prostitutional element of that liberalism which is no longer libertarianism. Because, according to it, let us not forget, it is heretical not to believe that everything is as good as everything else except two things—efficiency in making money or substituting metal or plaster devices for human effort and human thought.

To this audience I need hardly repeat the tale of the bitter and destructive consequences—the lowering of academic standards, the use of the higher education not as a sieve but as a cornucopia; the deeper and deeper intrusion of pre-professional preparation into the arts colleges, as though men were not men, needing knowledge of man and God, of beauty and righteousness, of good and of evil, but merely potential robots or machines in the guise of chemists or engineers or business administrators or even physicians. It is a melancholy and a

wretched story. Perhaps you will ask: what has it to do with the Man of Letters in American Culture? My answer is—everything.

The man of letters is primarily the man of values, the valuing man, the man of qualitative distinctions. As an artist he strives after perfection which he may define in sundry ways; as a thinker, as a teacher—and all the great poets and men of letters have been, however indirectly, teachers—he wants his vision of (to borrow the tag that Arnold was so fond of)—reason and the will of God to prevail. He may be rebel and inovator and desire to change or transvalue current values. In that case his emphasis on values is even more peremptory. But he cannot function in a society where among the vast majority of so-called literate people a bleak nihilism or denial of values prevails. He finds it increasingly hard, in truth, to account for the tough tenacity of the dull, lightless, miserable leavings of the decayed Enlightenment with that malice against man, which celebrated its final orgy in the Kinsey Report, and with the concept of progress as a multiplication of our present sins and evils. The only way he can account for its attractiveness is by remembering that it is the easiest way. It demands the exercise of neither faith nor reason; it asks for no active virtue; knowing no values, it liberates the lazy from the hardship of choice between the higher and the lower. It reminds him of the phrase of the French shopkeeper to the merely browsing customer: "*Regardez, Monsieur: ca n'engage a rien.*" It obligates people to nothing.

May I adduce quite briefly a few of the component elements of the cultural climate which would suffocate a man of letters, were he to arise among us?

People, especially the liberals, are very glib about the atomic age. They are the contemporaries of atomic fission and reason and react as though they were the contemporaries of Haeckel and Huxley in the darkest nineteenth century. In vain have they been told by Eddington and others that "the stuff of the world is mind-stuff" and that "all knowledge of our environment has entered in the form of messages transmitted along the nerves to the seat of consciousness." They will not learn that the only object of man's direct knowledge is his own soul and that hence there can be no change in the world until there is a change in the soul—in will, vision, temper. Bleakly and foolishly they use the cliche of mysticism for all such irrefutable reflections and continue on their irresponsible and disastrous way.

They cling with an equal stubbornness, of which the implications meet you in street and drawing room and pursue you, if you are a teacher, into your very classes, to what used to be called the Higher Criticism of the Bible and treat its conclusions as ascertained facts. The archaeological researches of Sir Leonard Woolley and others, the linguistic rectifications of Professor A. S. Yahuda, the entire re-construction

of the history of the Middle East are not permitted to seep into consciousness. In spite of the blood-drenched proof that, despite whatever discoveries in detail, the German heathens were wrong in every anterior assumption and therefore in every final conclusion, liberals of all sorts still treat as "reactionary" and—one of their favorite words: out-dated (as though dates had to do with truth)—our re-won knowledge of the inner authenticity and compelling force of the Torah of Israel. To admit this would create new obligations, both moral and intellectual and obligations are not exactly the liberals' dish of tea.

I come finally to the great anthropological fraud which, through the so-called social sciences, soaks the minds of broad strata of the pseudo-educated. It was started in America by the late Professor Franz Boas of Columbia, a Jew who was determined not to be a Jew and therefore determined that there should be *no* peculiar peoples and therefore determined—you see the line of reasoning—that man shall *not* have created his cultures in the image of his soul. I need go no farther than the popular book of his late brilliant pupil, Ruth Benedict's "Patterns of Culture." When I first read her book I thought the first sentence disfigured by a blighting printers' error. It reads: "anthropology is the study of human beings as creatures of society." "Creatures" seemed to me an obvious misprint for "creators." But the Boas "front" had to be at least ostensibly maintained. On page 253 Miss Benedict, who in her own person had some scruples, wrote: "No civilization has in it any element which in the last analysis is not the contribution of an individual." But she was badly frightened of the truths she could not avoid. What could be more admirable than her comparison of the *Gestalt* or configuration of a given culture to a style in art? Her qualms lead her into unconscious humor. "This integration of cultures," she wrote, "is not in the least mystical. It is the same process by which a style in art comes into being and persists." Note first that contemporary illiterate use of the word "mystical." Needless to say, Miss Benedict was thinking of neither Saint Theresa nor of the Zohar, the Book of Light. What do these liberals mean when they use "mystical" in a pejorative sense? I imagine they mean the ultimately inexplicable. But everything is that. Science knows the how, never the why. Man *knows* only the proximate and must grasp the ultimate by faith and vision. What, in this sense, could be more mystical than the character and rise of a style in art?

I come to the crucial point. Miss Benedict polemicises against those few who hold cultures to be created by human groups as the expression of the character of those groups. She calls this the "biological" interpretation. That again is darkest nineteenth century. For biologically men are all alike. They differ in their psychical appetences, habits and reactions. And so Miss Benedict avers that those who hold the "biological" view of the origin of cultures would have to

prove that human groups have different "basal metabolisms" and a varied "functioning of the ductless glands", and evidently did not see that the next question would be just as difficult, namely, how did these physiological variations come to be and what is the causal nexus between them and the styles or patterns of culture. In brief, the whole business would be as "mystical" as it was before. But even contemporary anthropologists have a vestigial conscience and so Miss Benedict gave the show away by unobtrusively using as the motto of her book a tremendous saying of the Digger Indians which contains the Alpha and Omega of the whole matter: "In the beginning God gave to every people a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life".

How deep these withered fallacies strike into the cultural life about us! Heretically, of course, from the point of view of the pseudo-liberals, including Mr. Kinsey, I tell my students that man is forever separated from the realm of nature not only by knowing himself as subject and the universe as object and remaining therefore the center about which the stars revolve, despite Copernicus. I tell them that man is torn out of the context of mere nature at least by language, by music, by mathematics. And in the eyes of some of these young people I see a troubled look. Their security is shaken. The universe is not a machine to which science holds the key. It is not a blue-print. Immortal forces clash in the human soul. Great creative choices among values are to be made. Moral obligations are to be incurred. Freedom is not to be prated about but exercised; progress, if there is such a thing, must be of the making of their wills.

III

In the cultural climate I have described criticism, which the man of letters needs, as Emerson pointed out, is not likely to flourish. Not because there are no exact or rigid standards. We want no pseudo-classical set of rules. We need neither an Aristotle nor a Boileau, But if the critic has not chosen a set of values of some sort to which he adheres, however undulant and flexible their application, even an intelligent impressionism cannot be used. In point of fact a curious, wooden dogmatism seems to arise. Reviewers will say glibly in the face of any enlargement or new application of the form of the novel: "This is no novel". As though they, usually lazy liberals and therefore nihilists, held in their keeping the arch-type of the novel and could forbid deviations therefrom. Reviewers of poetry, on the other hand, have abandoned all curbs and intellectual obligations and indulge in a quite private jargon. Most significant of the negation of values is the fact that the same critical vocabulary is applied even in the better periodicals and papers to a serious work of art and to the latest

tale in which a handsome imbecile chases a deep-bosomed wench through the papier-mache trappings of a former century.

But I want to turn to a perfectly concrete example of all that I have indicated. An example of it in action. It is a review—I have already referred to it—by the top-flight reviewer of the daily edition of the greatest newspaper in America, if not in the world. I will not name his name; I would not wound or even annoy him. As my dear dead friend, that excellent poet, William Ellery Leonard, wrote in one of the driest of his early sonnets—dry, mind you, like sound Burgundy and not like chalk or the stories of the imitators of Ernest Hemingway:

> The man himself could enter at my gate,
> Like any stranger, with his dog behind.

It is a book-review, then, of which I would speak. And the book reviewed is the last work of the greatest man of letters now alive on earth. It is Thomas Mann's "*Doctor Faustus*: Being the Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkuehn, as narrated by a Friend." It must be nearly a year since a copy of the German text published in Sweden reached me. I have read the book twice in its entirety; I have pondered certain pages again and again. It is indeed, as with a touch of irony, Dr. Mann wrote me, his "wildest book." It is a dark apocalyptic book; it is, as Goethe said of his Faust, incommensurable. It is story and apologue at the same time. It enlarges and transforms the novel as a form of art by what it is. It is tumultuous and strange. It cries and thunders. Why should it not? Did it ever before befall a great artist that he had to write the condemnation of his own people, of his flesh and blood and of all they had been and wrought for a thousand years? For Thomas Mann is not satisfied with denouncing that pact with Satan which the German people made in this century. Toward this pact, he says in effect, this people fared for ten bitter centuries. This event is indeed an event. Underground the foul fires were smouldering. From time to time they were whipped into flames. And even German God-seeking was not guiltless in bringing about the dreadful end, nor German music which Mann rightly, inevitably chooses as the sign and symbol of this people, as the special mark upon the brow of this Cain. And it is no wonder that in the voice of the narrator, the good, kind classicist, Serenus Zeitblom (note his name), the decent, helpless German fascinated all his life by the terrible genius and glittering decadence of Leverkuehn, there whispers and murmurs and weeps a half-choking: "The pity of it . . . the pity of . . ."

Of all this our cool and pert reviewer shows no consciousness. Did he read—could he read—the melancholy motto from the Inferno

with which Thomas Mann strikes a soft prelude: ". . . I, alone, was preparing myself to bear the war both of the journey and the pity, which memory, that errs not, shall relate. O Muses, O high Genius, now help me! O Memory, that has inscribed what I saw, here will be shown thy nobleness". The book, then, is the story of a hell-faring. Unlike Dante, Thomas Mann did not fare into the hell created by an imagination, however burning, but into a place—a real place—of ineffable horror, misery, crime and satanic sinfulness.

This is the work which came—in a quite inadequate translation, to be sure—to our reviewer's table. Had I been asked to review it even after a whole year's knowledge of it, I would still have begged for some further weeks of study; I would still have wanted, as it were, to fast and pray. Our reviewer, busy, imperturable, sure that he knows it all, storms forward under full sail, no vestige of shame upon his brow or of humility within his heart. Thomas Mann, a novelist? "Little of his work," writes our reviewer, "has possessed the ordinary virtues of fiction". One is breathless. Not even Buddenbrooks, not even the novelettes from Tonio Kroeger and Triestan through Death in Venice and Mario and the Magician? Not even they? But what this reviewer, in our immediate cultural climate, does not dream is that the great masters do not aim after the "ordinary virtues" exhibited by the mass-production of a given genre in a given period. According to this measure, Milton should have been Cowley and, to descend many rungs of the ladder of excellence, Shaw should have been Pinero and Eugene O'Neill the late Augustus Thomas and Mr. Robert Frost should have been Robert Service. So Doctor Faustus, lacking, according to our reviewer, with the rest of Thomas Mann's work, "the ordinary virtues of fiction" is set down by him "as to be called a novel only by the loosest possible use of the term". How, one wonders, does our reviewer define the term—to include Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake and "A la recherche du Temps perdu"? Perhaps. For these works have a wide acceptance. He was not left alone with them on publication. Nor does he dream that Thomas Mann declared the novel to ge in a state of crisis as a form of art many years ago and that very intelligent French publisher Bernard Grasset begged, not so long ago, that its neck be wrung. One feels like echoing that wish when one reads the thousandth, may I say zolaizing novel with its gilded—cheaply gilded—delineation of the working classes and its sociological implication which, once again, obligates the reader to nothing?

But I have not exhausted our reviewer's achievements. He talks of the book's "ponderous, pedantic way", of "imposing, turgid and frequently obscure dissertations" and of "woeful prolixity". Now one does not expect a newspaper reviewer to reach Thomas Mann in the original text nor even, a far slighter matter, Andre Gide. Yet a

man who reviews important books in a great paper three to four times a week ought, at least, to be aware of his own limitations and operate, as it were, within them. Translations are notoriously inadequate and the greater the stylist, the more inadequate they are likely to be. I have read an article by an intelligent and modest American who wanted to be told just how Thomas Mann wrote. He felt that the existing versions were below Mann's reputation as a stylist. Well, this is not the place to characterize that style, inseparable from substance, of course, as soul on earth from body—a perfect incarnation. But it may be said that the adjectives of our reviewer are the most foolish, quite literally so, that could be used. Thomas Mann's style has a high degree of periodicity, far more spontaneous, by the way, than that of Marcel Proust. But this periodicity is directed and controlled by a pervasive and ordered sense of musicality. Nor is that all. Mann is an elegant writer; he has a Latin, an un-German, if you like, a Vergilian tact and taste. The difficult passages, finally—and what writer seeking to interpret this age, can fail to be difficult—are rendered supremely attractive by the constant suffusion of the intellectual with the life-blood of concreteness, the seen, the heard, the felt.

You may say that I am making a great deal of the review of a single mediocre reviewer. Alas, that review is quite typical of the reception which the work of a man of letters receives among us in this age. The review of Doctor Faustus in the *New Yorker* Magazine, a publication not wholly devoid of literary sensibility, was almost as coarse, as lacking in humility. The man had read the book quite as belligerently, quite as devoid of the "wise passiveness" of Wordsworth's monition, quite as determined (with a kind of inverted snobbishness) to make vulgarity and the *Saturday Evening Post* taste in fiction to prevail. These reviews, let me repeat, are typical; they have been typical for years. They represent a resistance, half conscious and half unconscious, to high powewr and high distinction. Exceptions to them, like Professor Harry Levin's review of *Doctor Faustus* in the Sunday *Times*, issue almost invariably and very significantly from academic sources.

Now we may agree with the observation which Matthew Arnold made so long ago (1864) that "the production of great works of literature and art is not at all epochs and under all conditions possible". Our age is one of unexampled moral deterioration, turbulent, confused, devoid of hope and order. And indeed our distinguished spirits in literature are all survivors from another age. Andre Gide is seventy-nine; Thomas Mann and Robert Frost are seventy-three; even Mr. Eliot is sixty. And so it may be best for us and most profitable to seek, following Matthew Arnold once again, "to make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself."

Yet that is what we seem least able to do, in the total absence of serious criticism—pervasive valuing and criticising—which might create a kinder climate for the man of letters, were he to arise among us.

IV

On this negative note I would have to end, were it not for one circumstance—the existence of our institutes of higher education. Let no one think that I am merely pleading *pro domo*. I have not dwelt in that house for many years and I have but just taken up my dwelling in it again. But all during those years I said and wrote on many occasions that culture in the United States had practically withdrawn into the academies and was in the hands of a mandarinate which—I must be frank with you, too—did not always sufficiently guard and tend the sacred flame entrusted by destiny to its keeping. Concerning the fact, at least, there can be no doubt. There are no book-shops in our cities. On the French Main Street, as many of you know even in provincial towns in the Midi, there was and is not only epicerie, a boucherie, a herboristerie but also a *librairie*. Where are our shops? Even the streamlined chains are not book-shops. Ask in them for a classic outside of a current series. Ask for a *book*. All their counters hold are the trade-goods, the merchandise of the hour. If a book —it might be a masterpiece—hasn't sold out by inventory time or even before, back it goes to the publisher or jobber. The "trade" knows only *ephimeridae*.

We have no book-shops. We have no Reviews. Try to sell a critical study of a writer. Try to have it printed for nothing. It can't be done. There is no place. Criticism is confined to reviewing, and I have illustrated the character of nine-tenths of all reviewing. I have not even remarked upon certain more ignominious elements in the practise of reviewing. I have an important book coming out in the spring. I have only one neck and I need it in my business. Nor have we cafes where literary conversation, the most fruitful kind of criticism, can be heard. I know of one—just one. It is on Second Avenue in New York and the conversation is in the Yiddish language. There the new poets are discussed. At publishers' teas or cocktail parties prices for merchandise are discussed—prices from magazines or film-companies. The quips of Bennet Cerf are repeated and relished. There are no *salons*, as there were in Berlin in better days. Goethe's glory was nurtured by Berlin hostesses a hundred and twenty-five years ago and Rainer Maria Rilke's in what, but for unspeakable crime and distaster, would seem but a few short years behind us.

We have no book-shops; we have no reviews; we have no salons. We have—what have we as the single instrumentality for the preserva-

tion and the passing on of culture and of values? We have the college classroom. We have nothing else. I need not tell you how that college classroom has been assaulted through the years and what various forces have battered at it to keep it from its true function as the preserver of culture and of values. The professional pedagogues, the cultivators of teaching-techniques without character or content have battered it; the vocational educationists (most dreadful of all those tribes) have tried to over-run it; so-called progressives have sought to destroy it root and branch; opportunist politicians have clamored for the lowering of standards to the least common denominator of the offspring of their constituents. The monstrous waves of the malicious attempt to destroy quality for the sake of quantity have gone over it. The hatred of the lower for the higher forms of life has been upon its door-step. The wonder is not that the higher education in America is bruised and sore; the wonder is that it exists. The greater wonder is the college teachers have in quite recent years arisen and turned upon the rabble and upon their tormentors and have declared that the eternal humanities are the proper and permanent instrumentalities for the education of youth.

Luckily there exists among the American people a half-pathetic faith in education. A good deal of it is very impure, since it looks upon education merely as a tool of economic and social competition. But it exists. It has grown. It has finally increased our college population to the staggering figure of more than two millions. Of course, a good many of these boys and girls have slipped into college through the too large meshes of a fraudulent net. Thousands of them are not educable in any true sense. Enough and more than enough remain to be persuaded to some measure of disinterestedness, some not wholly superficial sense of the meaning of value, some freedom from the servitude to materialistic superstition, some feeling of responsibility for the culture of their country, some aspiration beyond the collecting of fees and the multiplication of vain devices.

In his beautifully serene old age Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter in which he observed that, as men seemed to be born Aristotelians or Platonists, so they seemed to be born with a leaning to the rule in a state either of the common people or of the *aristoi*, the best. Now these two leanings or policies can, in actual practice, be combined. A democracy needs and uses influences and leaders. The influences and leaders exist; they are active; we have but to regard them to see the enormous function of a humanistic education in America. From those two millions of college students, or from some fraction of them, it is for us to select the *aristoi*, the best—the best not, needless to say, by the test of lineage or property, but by the single pure and ultimate test of God's grace. It is for these best to attempt to refashion

the temper of our society, to create gradually an intellectual and spiritual climate in conformity to the true lights which this age has found and to blend with these lights the flame of the torch of the undrying tradition of man's spirit. A period of criticism, of clearing the air, of establishing right values, may then ensue, from which one day the poet and the man of letters may arise.